

For discussion on
25 May 2020

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Question-setting Mechanism of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

Purpose

This paper aims to outline the question-setting mechanism of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and explain the views of the Education Bureau (EDB) on question 2(c) of the History 1 examination paper in the 2020 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE).

2020 HKDSE History Examination

2. One of the questions in History Paper 1 of the 2020 HKDSE is about Sino-Japanese relations in the first half of the 20th century. Question 2(c) provides two pieces of information and states that “Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-1945”. Subsequent to the examination, the question has aroused great controversy in society.

3. The History Curriculum & Assessment Guide (C&A Guide) (Secondary 4 - 6) sets out a number of aims, which include enabling students to approach past and current events in an impartial and empathetic manner, using a variety of perspectives; understanding the characteristics and values of their own culture; and cultivating both national consciousness and the consciousness of being citizens of the global community. Therefore, when there are problems in the implementation of the curriculum and assessment, especially those involving educational and examination and assessment organisations, the Education Bureau

(EDB) has the responsibility to safeguard the education profession and take corresponding rectifying actions in the interests of students and the public.

The EDB's follow-up actions

4. To maintain the professionalism, fairness, impartiality and credibility of the HKDSE, the EDB is going to take / has taken the following actions:

- (a) To assign a team of officers who are familiar with the curriculum and quality assurance to visit the HKEAA to investigate the question setting, vetting and approval mechanism under the HKDSE, and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with during the preparation of the History examination paper.
- (b) To request the HKEAA to invalidate the examination question concerned and make appropriate adjustments to safeguard the reliability and validity of the History examination, ensuring that all candidates are fairly treated.
- (c) Although the HKEAA is empowered to plan and conduct the HKDSE, in view of the recent incident which has aroused grave public concern, the EDB will review the existing mechanism to fulfil its role of monitoring the conduct of the HKDSE, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE and the examination papers.

5. The HKDSE is an examination with international recognition. The HKEAA has put in place question-setting and question moderation mechanism for different subjects. The mechanisms concerned are at **Annex 1**. It is worth conducting detailed investigation as to why a problematic examination question appears in this year's History paper despite all these mechanisms, which has affected the candidates and the

realisation of the aims and objectives of the History curriculum.

EDB's views on the question concerned

6. The EDB's views on the examination question concerned are at **Annex 2**.

Education Bureau
May 2020

Mechanism for Setting and Moderating HKDSE Questions

The HKEAA is responsible for the setting and moderating HKDSE questions. At present, a moderation committee is set up for each of the 24 Category A subjects of the HKDSE. Each moderation committee comprises the Chief Examiner, setters and moderators. Apart from the subject manager from the HKEAA, members include subject / curriculum experts, experienced secondary school teachers and academics from post-secondary institutions. The duty of the moderation committee is to develop examination questions and marking schemes in alignment with the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework. The primary principles of question setting for the public examinations are meeting the requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework, and effectively assessing students' abilities.

2. Members of the moderation committees are appointed through various channels, including nominations from schools and subject committees, as well as selection from among experienced markers. The major considerations in selection of members include their subject knowledge and expertise, as well as their relevant experience in teaching and assessment. The nominations for the moderation committee of each subject will also be assessed by the General Manager - Assessment Development (or Assistant General Manager - Assessment Development), and the Director – Public Examinations. The appointment of moderation committee members is reviewed annually with a turnover of membership. The members, regardless of their personal background and beliefs, should set examination questions professionally based on the curriculum and assessment requirements according to the established mechanisms of the HKEAA, so as to ensure that students are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner. The Chief Examiner is responsible for leading the work of developing examination questions and marking

schemes to ensure that the examination papers can manifest the spirit of the curriculum and is in alignment with the requirements of the Assessment Framework. All question-setting and moderation work is confidential; participants are not allowed to disclose any information to others.

3. After the public examination has been conducted, the Chief Examiner of the moderation committee will be responsible for leading the work of marking the examination scripts, including reviewing sample scripts and analysing candidates' actual performance with the Assistant Examiners, so as to set the marking criteria and standards. The Chief Examiner will also chair the Markers' Meeting to explain the assessment objectives, requirements of each question to the markers, as well as answer markers' questions to ensure consistency in assessment. The markers are mostly frontline teachers. An open recruitment for markers is held every year. A grade point mechanism is adopted, and the selection criteria include the applicants' relevant teaching and marking experience, their academic qualifications, and whether they are subject panel heads. The points required for appointment are subject to the number of applicants every year and their qualifications. The political background or stance of the Chief Examiner, members of the moderation committees or markers has no bearing on their appointment.

(Source: HKEAA)

**The Education Bureau's Views on
Question No. 2(c) of History Paper 1 of
the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

Candidates easily misled by the sources provided

The historical materials quoted in the question are not complete. It is highly likely that students will be misled into making wrong interpretations, resulting in possible incorrect understanding of the historical events.

2. Major issues were overlooked in the account of the historical events in Source D of the question. Extract A and Extract B in Source D are related to the background and conditions of the loan of the Mitsui Company, in which complicated historical facts are involved. However, a full account of these facts is absent in the Source, and not all conditions of the loan are set out in one of the Extracts. Back then, the mineral resources of China were long coveted by Japan. Therefore, Japan took advantage of the weakness of the Republican Government which lacked capital and demanded that if the Republican Government wished to obtain the loan, it was obliged to let Japan obtain the shares of the Hanyeping Company (**the Enclosure**). Economic independence might be lost if the event was handled improperly. The entire nation was aware of the conspiracy behind the act and vehemently objected to the request. At present, the major topics featured in our curriculum and textbooks are all related to the history of Japanese invasion of China. Such historical events are only briefly covered in textbooks. No detailed account of these historical events would be given even if they are mentioned by individual teachers in class. Nor would such teachers comment on these events from the perspective of “good” or “harm”. For the general Secondary 6 students studying this specific historical period of China, the depth of their learning would not reach a level that enables them to understand the

developments of these events. As such, students would easily be misled by both Extracts of Source D into thinking that it was good for Japan to make the loan to the provisional government as the loan would help the new government (i.e. the so-called “good”). Also, students would use the events as an evidence in their answers to demonstrate that what Japan did was “good” to China. In short, the information contained in the question per se made the candidates develop a biased or even wrong understanding of the events concerned. Such information required students to have an understanding of the historical events that went beyond the required standards of students. The candidates could easily be misled by the one-sided information contained in the leading questions. More importantly, it would affect the historical understanding of the candidates (especially those who will not study history in future) about this specific period.

3. Source C itself is not exactly a very appropriate example of the “good”. The Japanese Ambassador to Qing Dynasty Yano Fumio wrote that “the Qing Government will actively keep sending students to our nation in the future, so the power of our nation will be discreetly strengthened in the East Asian continent.” One historian considers that “the Japanese Government merely wanted to cultivate a pro-Japanese elite class in the Chinese society by allowing Qing Chinese students to study in Japan.”¹ As a source in a question paper of a public examination, Source C is not a sound example of “good”. On the contrary, it will be too difficult for the students to use this as an example of “harm”.

Failure of question setting to meet the aims and objectives of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide

4. The setting of this question was not aligned with the rationale of the curriculum and failed to meet the aims and objectives set out in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide (C&A Guide). The curriculum aims of the History subject are to enable students to explore the progress of

¹ Wang Ke (PhD of the University of Tokyo, Japan and Professor at the Graduate School of the Kobe University) Mentorship, Friends, and Foes: Nationalism and Modern Sino-Japanese Relations, p. 8 and p.10.

human civilisation in the past and to learn about the history of our country and around the world, so as to nurture their sense of national identity with humanities and a global perspective and to establish positive values and attitudes. The assessment content deviated from the learning objectives stated in the History C&A Guide for Secondary 4 to 6. The senior secondary History curriculum takes the stance that there are some fundamental values and attitudes commonly held in our community and across other societies, such as regard for human life and dignity and the quest for peace, co-operation and prosperity. Hence, as a 3-year senior secondary curriculum, the History subject tries to provide students with learning experiences to develop positive values and attitudes, and at the same time encourages teachers to introduce different perspectives as much as possible through class discussion and to remind students to review and reflect on their viewpoints to arrive at balanced judgments on issues. Upon completion of the senior secondary course, students should have cultivated the values and attitudes that are the attributes of a responsible citizen (Extract from P.1-3 of the History C&A Guide (Secondary 4 - 6) (with updates in November 2015)).

5. The question has adopted more “good” than “harm” as the analysis dimension. Not only has it deviated from the historical facts, but it has also contradicted the rationale of the curriculum, failed to meet the aims and objectives of the C&A Guide and neglected the essence of nurturing humanity, morality and historical values as promoted in the History subject. It is impossible to make a reasonable comparison between the atrocities committed by the Japanese Army during its invasion of China and any so-called benefits generated in that period, let alone doing more “good” than “harm”. The way of setting the examination question has not considered that the people who suffered during the Japanese invasion of China would feel offended. Such lack of empathy is like rubbing salt into the victims’ wounds.

Inappropriate to set as an open-ended question

6. Although the question is set in an open-ended form, there has

already been mainstream consensus on the related historical events, and there is very little scope for argument under the related secondary school History curriculum. Under the circumstances, is there any room at all for an argument for more “good” than “harm” to be established? Is it appropriate to set a question which does not allow an alternative conclusion to be set in the form of an open-ended question? Will open-ended questions on similar topics like this be misleading to candidates? The wording of the question is also inappropriate. It is absolutely inappropriate to represent the grave suffering of the whole country inflicted by the Japanese invasion by the single word “harm”.

Impossible to devise a marking scheme

7. Given the above inadequacies of the question, how can we compare and allocate marks to the different approaches of analysis? These varied approaches include an argument for more “harm” than “good”; an argument that the superficially so-called “doing good” is in fact “doing harm”; an argument that all the so-called “good” has been overwhelmed by the brutality of Japanese invasion of China; and an argument that there is more “good” than “harm”. Should a balanced analysis of “good” and “harm” be given higher marks, or should an argument for all “harm” and no “good” be given lower marks owing to its one-sidedness? Or should it be the case that an argument for more “harm” than “good” be given higher marks?

8. This question built upon a comparative analysis of “good” and “harm” of the period of Sino-Japanese history between 1900-1945 is grossly inappropriate. Coupled with the finding that Sources C and D have a high possibility of misleading candidates, it is impossible to devise a meaningful marking scheme for this question. If we ignore all these considerations and proceed with the marking work, we will give a wrong signal in history education to the effect that the very essence of history education is on the skills of fallacious argument. In fact, the tremendous harm Japan inflicted on China during 1900-1945 was crystal clear and beyond dispute, and it is extremely difficult to make any objective

assessment free of any value judgement simply on the basis of a quantitative or balancing comparative analysis of the examples of “good” and “harm”. When an objective marking scheme cannot be devised, no fair and reliable marking can be advised.

9. In addition, Source D has a high possibility of misleading candidates. If the marking scheme considers it a wrong answer if candidates’ interpret Source D as examples of “good”, this will not be fair to them since it is not a reasonable expectation for candidates to be able to induce Source D as “bad” based on the provided information. If marks are given to wrong interpretations of supporting evidence of historical events, this will contradict the educational aims by turning History examination questions into comprehension questions, with grave detrimental washback effect and seriously undermining the learning outcome of students.

Enclosure to Annex 2

According to the study entitled 《漢冶萍公司史略》(Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1972, p154-156.) conducted by Professor Chuan Han-sheng, expert in the economic history of China from the Department of History, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Japan had long coveted the Hanyeping Company (漢冶萍公司). As the company owned iron and coal mines and was mainly engaged in the production of steel and iron, its importance to national defence was clearly evident. In a bid to take control over the company, Japan offered a loan to the provisional government in exchange for running the company jointly with China. Negotiations on the loan were made by Sheng Xuanhuai, General Manager of the Hanyeping Company with Japan. The loan was provided by the Japanese side through a capital injection into the Hanyeping Company, which then provided a loan to the provisional government. This plan to jointly run the Hanyeping Company by China and Japan was generally opposed by Chinese nationals who considered that the company would eventually end up in Japan's pocket, resulting in the surrender of sovereignty and humiliation to the nation. The loan involved three contracts. Owing to the strong opposition countrywide, the first and second contracts were finally cancelled. Only the third contract, the extract of which is shown as Extract B in Source D, was signed. The third contract contained a total of five clauses but the source only quoted part of Clauses 2 and 3.